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**STATE REPRESENTATIVE
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HOUSE DEMOCRATS REVERSE OPPOSITION TO REAL EDUCATION REFORM WITH RACE TO THE TOP SUGGESTIONS

~ Rep. John Legg looking forward to their support in 2010 legislative session ~

PORT RICHEY, FL – In a reversal of years of opposition to meaningful education reform in Florida's public schools, Florida House Democrats have reversed course and recommended that the Florida Department of Education, in its attempts to compete for federal Race to the Top education dollars proposed by President Obama, adopt the very reforms that House Democrats have voted against time and time again, as recently as this year.

"It is very encouraging that the Florida House Democratic Caucus has publically embraced key education reform concepts that the Florida House has been advocating for years," stated John Legg (R- Port Richey), PreK-12 Policy Committee Chairman.

"I appreciate their support and I'm hopeful that in the coming session my House Democratic colleagues will vote for the reforms they now say they have embraced. Because last session, when these very same concepts were brought before the House PreK-12 Policy Committee, the majority of Democrats opposed the reforms which they are now advocating.

In response to the federal Race to the Top Program proposed by President Obama and US Education Secretary Arne Duncan, the Florida Department of Education solicited ideas for its own application for the federal dollars. The policy reversals from the House Democrats were part of their submission to the Florida Education Commissioner Eric J. Smith's call for input in the state's application.

These reversals are even more significant because during the 2009 Legislative Session, the House PreK-12 Policy Committee passed legislation to reform the FCAT, create higher academic standards, and clearly define core knowledge and achievement goals, as well as establishing statewide, standardized end of course exams that ensure our students

are mastering this core knowledge before they graduate from high school. House Democrats opposed each of those reforms when passed only a few months ago, but embrace them now.

See the following statements recently proposed by the Florida House Democratic Caucus to Commissioner Smith and the contrasting legislative action that occurred during recent sessions.

Standards

Florida Democratic Caucus: “The academic standards that students meet to graduate high school should be enhanced to ensure that more Florida graduates are prepared for college or to compete in the global marketplace. *We propose phasing in a requirement that Algebra II, Geometry, Biology I, and high-level physical sciences be added to Florida’s high school graduation requirements.*”

- [Race to the Top Recommendations submitted to Florida Department of Education](#), Ron Matus, St. Petersburg Times Gradebook Blog

- During the 2009 Regular Session, CS/CS/HB 1293 by Rep. Fresen sought to amend high school graduation requirements to include geometry, Algebra II, Biology I, and either chemistry or physics. The bill passed the PreK-12 Policy Committee by a vote of 7-4 (with all Democrat committee members voting Nay, i.e., Reps. Bullard, Jones, Kiar and Kriseman). The bill went on to pass the House by a vote of 75-42 (largely along partisan lines), but died in the Senate.

Assessment

Florida Democratic Caucus: “Florida House Democrats propose implementing a new strategy of school accountability that ends reliance on the high stakes Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test as Florida’s sole public school accountability tool for grades 3-8 and the most heavily weighted factor in accountability for grades 9-12. *We propose requiring schools to use end-of-course exams to measure student performance in both core and non-core curriculum areas in all grades. End-of-course exams would comprise about 25 percent of the new accountability formula.* About 75 percent of the new accountability formula should also include (a) a student’s overall academic performance (i.e. GPAs and/or student portfolios), (b) a school’s ability to ready students for promotion to the next grade and careers, and (c) a school’s successful use of technology and innovation in the classroom.”

- [Race to the Top Recommendations submitted to Florida Department of Education](#), Ron Matus, St. Petersburg Times Gradebook Blog

- During the 2009 Regular Session, CS/HB 543 by Rep. Mayfield sought to replace the Grade 11 Science FCAT with a required EOC in Biology I. The bill passed the PreK-12 Policy Committee by a vote of 11-2 (with half of the Democratic committee members- Democratic Reps. Bullard and Kiar- voting Nay.)

- However, many of the House Democrats' recommendations are already in place. During the 2008 Regular Session, the Legislature passed SB 1908, which changes the way high schools are graded. As of the 2009-2010 school year, in addition to the FCAT components, high school grades will be based upon overall graduation rate, graduation rate of at-risk students, student participation and performance in accelerated classes, postsecondary readiness of students, student performance on end-of-course exams (as data becomes available), and growth or decline in each of these components.

Great Teachers and Leaders

Florida Democratic Caucus: "To encourage high quality teaching in low-performing schools Florida should offer National Board Certified teachers incentives to help struggling students reach their full potential."

- [Race to the Top Recommendations submitted to Florida Department of Education](#), Ron Matus, St. Petersburg Times Gradebook Blog

- During the 2009 Regular Session, the House's version of the conforming bill (HB 5005) sought to encourage National Board Certified teachers to provide high quality teaching in low-performing schools, by requiring those teachers to teach at low-performing schools in order to be eligible for a salary bonus. This measure faced strong opposition from Democrats in the House, and was removed during conference with the Senate.
- In addition, s. 1012.22, F.S., already requires that each district school board adopt a salary schedule with differentiated pay based upon additional responsibilities, school demographics, critical shortage areas, and level of job performance difficulties.

Florida Democratic Caucus: "Strong principals should be incentivized to lead low performing schools which will naturally attract high quality teachers because of their strong leadership. Job security for good teachers should be meaningful in Florida. Teachers should be eligible for professional services contracts after a reasonable period of satisfactory work under annual contracts."

- [Florida Democrats may push differential pay for teachers](#), Ron Matus, St. Petersburg Times Gradebook Blog

- During the 2009 Regular Session, CS/CS/HB 1411 by Rep. Stargel sought to provide better job security for *good* teachers by emphasizing student performance as a measure used to evaluate teachers. The bill also sought to give principals a "reasonable period" to evaluate new teachers, in order to better determine a teacher's eligibility to receive a professional services contract. The bill passed the PreK-12 Policy Committee by a vote of 9-4 (with all Democrat committee members voting Nay, i.e., Reps. Bullard, Jones, Kiar and Kriseman). The bill faced strong opposition from Democrats in the House and was significantly amended before passing the House by a vote of 71-46 (largely along partisan lines), but died in the Senate.

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